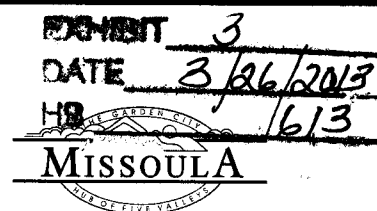




Department of Grants and Community Programs

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March 21, 2013

To: House Judiciary Committee  
From: Shantelle Gaynor, Missoula County Department of Grants and Community Programs  
Re: Support for HB613

Missoula County Department of Grants and Community Programs appreciates the opportunity to be able to submit written testimony in support of HB613. My name is Shantelle Gaynor and I am a Grants Administrator and Program Director for the Missoula City/County Department of Grants and Community Programs. The Crime Victim Advocate Program (CVA) is a program of our office. Established in 1985, the CVA Program is one of the oldest legal advocacy programs in Montana. Missoula's CVA Program provides free and confidential assistance to victims of relationship violence, sexual assault, stalking and other crimes by offering advocacy and resource information in civil and criminal matters. In 2012 the CVA program served over 1,500 victims providing crisis counseling, assistance obtaining orders of protection, help with navigating the court system, safety planning and information and referrals that are all aimed at supporting victims and helping them find safety.

We strongly support House Bill 613 sponsored by Representative Price. HB 613 would provide state funds to help support the work of victim services in the state of Montana. Currently, Montana is one of only a few states that does not provide state funds for these critical services. This change is vitally important.

Currently federal funds that are either administered at the state or federal level make up 81% of our funding. A significant portion, 61% of our total budget is comprised of competitive grants which may or may not be refunded from year to year. Additionally, with the volatile nature of the federal budget process, these funds are often threatened. As the Grants Administrator for the Missoula County Department of Grants and Community Programs and the program manager for the Crime Victim Advocate Program (CVA) I am fearful that cuts, such as with the "sequester" or a project being defunded will mean that we will be forced to reduce critical services and lay off staff.

In 2012 funding CVA program funds were cut nearly 11%, yet the number of clients served increased by 18% over the previous year. *Nearly forty percent of all crimes against persons in Missoula County are related to domestic violence.* For the past several years, advocates handling both civil and criminal cases have reported that numerous cases have been unusually complex and time-consuming. In addition to the violence victims are experiencing, many clients report a host of other critical issues including the loss of employment; facing the risk of homelessness; experiencing long-term health consequences of victimization, including traumatic brain injury; and, dealing with health and behavioral issues in their children who have witnessed the violence. The continuation of direct services for victims of dating and domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking is a key component to addressing this issue. Additional funding cuts in the face of rising need may be devastating to our community. In failing to provide these services we may be leaving victims to face dangerous situations with few options. In the cases of domestic violence, when victims don't have an avenue to leave abusive relationships they may face



increased injury, harm to their children or even death. In terms of dollars and cents, funds that help keep victims safe are far less expensive than funds to prosecute homicides.

Please do whatever is possible to ensure that funding for victim services is adequate for our work and predictable from year to year. Budgets should not be balanced on the backs of victims of sexual and domestic violence. Rather, budgets should demonstrate our collective commitment to offering victims a path to safety and peace and ensuring that their children can live in homes free of fear and violence.